




IN SUMMARY: NOS STAKEHOLDER DIALOG

Ocean and Coastal Program Managers' Meeting

N MARCH 10, NOAA Ocean Service (NOS) Assistant Administrator Dr. Richard Spinrad hosted a dialog with approximately 70 coastal, estuarine and marine sanctuary program officials from across the country. The forum, held in conjunction with the 2005 Ocean and Coastal Program Managers' meeting, provided an important opportunity for local, state and federal representatives to discuss a broad range of ocean and coastal policy issues with Dr. Spinrad, Mary Glackin (Assistant Administrator, Office of Program Planning and Integration) and Louisa Koch (Deputy Assistant Administrator, Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research). A number of NOAA Ocean Service (NOS) officials, also participated in the dialog, including Eldon Hout (Director, Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management); Charlie Challstrom (Director, National Geodetic Survey); Margaret Davidson (Director, NOAA Coastal Services Center); Joe Uravitch (Director, National MPA Center); and Tom Kitsos (Senior Policy Advisor).

OPENING REMARKS

Dr. Spinrad began the meeting by summarizing recent changes to NOS leadership, including the appointments of Jack Hayes (Deputy Assistant Administrator), Craig McLean (Executive Officer), Tom Kitsos (Senior Policy Director) and Dave Zilkoski (acting Technical Director). He talked about the increased national attention to ocean issues resulting from the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy Report (USCOP), and said the agency was at a turning point in its effort to be a Global Leader in Integrated Management of the Ocean.

Dr. Spinrad summarized the Administration's response to the USCOP Report, and described the role of the Cabinet-level Committee on Ocean Policy in coordinating federal efforts related to coastal stewardship and marine science and technology. Noting that changes in ocean policy may take several years to implement, he urged members of the ocean and coastal community to work together to develop unified messages to help set the policy agenda on ocean issues.

Dr. Spinrad discussed the role of the Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS) in addressing critical societal needs, and noted Vice Admiral Conrad Lautenbacher's leadership at the Third Global Earth Observation Summit in Brussels, where 60 countries and the European Commission adopted a 10-year international implementation plan. He also commented on the recent Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) meeting in Paris, where he led the U.S. delegation in efforts to develop a tsunami warning system for the Indian Ocean.

Dr. Spinrad also talked about NOAA's new strategic plan for FY 2005-2010, and described the role of the NOAA goal teams in shaping the agency's budget. He also discussed NOAA's research plan and partnership activities in the Gulf of Mexico, and said the agency will continue to reach out to stakeholders at all levels as it executes its strategic vision.

DIALOG SESSION

Dr. Spinrad opened the discussion by asking participants to discuss how NOAA could improve its products and services to assist them in their work. He also asked the program managers to comment on regional issues and the role of ocean observation systems in supporting coastal and ocean management. Several major themes emerged, as outlined below.



Committee on Ocean Policy

Several participants expressed concern that regional interests were not represented on the Committee on Ocean Policy. They said that state and local officials, and other stakeholders outside of Washington, DC, would benefit from an open line of communication with the Committee on Ocean Policy. Dr. Spinrad agreed that improving communications was important, and emphasized that the Department of Commerce, as well as other federal agencies represented on the Committee, was very interested in hearing from stakeholders at the state and local levels. He noted that many of the ideas in the U.S. Ocean Action Plan had come from outside of Washington, and said that the subcommittees and working groups identified in the Plan also provided opportunities for stakeholders to bring their concerns to the table.

Regional Governance

Although many participants were pleased that the U.S. Ocean Action Plan highlighted regional collaboration (e.g., Great Lakes and Gulf of Mexico), they said that federal funding cuts for key programs, such as nonpoint source controls, would make it difficult to achieve regional goals. They also said there was significant confusion over roles and responsibilities, and emphasized that it was not clear how state and local priorities would be addressed at the federal level. Another speaker urged the managers to work with their federal partners to identify a set of principles on regional governance that assured flexibility and included key stakeholders, such as emergency managers.

Several speakers stated that there was a “disconnect” between NOAA’s strategic plan and the agency’s support for regional activities. They said that NOAA’s strategic vision is very good, but expressed concern that funding for regional observation systems, ecosystem management, and other regional ocean and coastal programs is not readily available. They also questioned whether sustained funding for regional activities would be available in the future.

Ecosystem Approach to Management

Although the participants supported efforts to develop an ecosystem approach to management, they said it was not clear how state and local programs fit into NOAA’s strategic vision and how their agencies would be involved. The managers urged NOAA to help identify key “gaps” and information needs in defining ecosystems, and said that NOS needs to work more closely with the National Marine Fisheries Service to assure that fishery concerns do not dominate efforts in this area. They also urged NOAA to identify opportunities to apply ecosystem management concepts at the local level in association with habitat restoration and other ongoing projects.

Dr. Spinrad noted their concerns and said there was a greater willingness within NOAA to address these issues, as demonstrated by the work of the Ecosystem Goal Team. He also discussed the role of other federal agencies, and commented on the need to bring all interested parties to the table to address multi-species management issues.

Promoting Coastal Stewardship

Although many of the participants expressed concern over cuts in federal assistance, they recognized that the public is often not aware of the important products and services that ocean and coastal programs provide. The managers discussed how coastal indicators and performance measures could be used to support increased funding by demonstrating the economic and resource benefits of their activities. They also said that a number of government agencies have coastal and marine resource management responsibilities, which often creates confusion for the public.

The managers agreed that officials at the state and federal levels must do a better job of educating the public about the benefits of their programs. They discussed how to best get their message across, and recognized the need to tell the story from the “bottom up” in order to show how their activities benefit local communities.

In closing, Dr. Spinrad commented on the fact that ocean and coastal management concerns will continue to receive increased attention as a result of the USCOP report. He urged managers to work together to send a unified message to the public, and stressed the need for performance measures and other indicators to demonstrate the value of these programs to policymakers and budget officials.

